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ABSTRACT

Demographic trends show an increase in the number of Black and Hispanic students in the United States, whereas the number of minority teachers is decreasing. This paper explores possible causes of this phenomenon, its implications, and some alternative responses aimed at improving the situation. Cultural isolation on college campuses and state testing and licensing standards affect numbers of minority teachers. Decreasing numbers of minority teachers mean that role models are lacking to encourage minority students to pursue careers in education. And as the proportion of minority teachers falls, the perceived importance of academic achievement to minority students also declines. Increasing numbers of minority dropouts will produce long-term economic consequences: higher rates of unemployment, increase welfare dependence and crime, and fewer qualified workers. In the rural South, this situation is made worse by structural problems in these communities, which inhibit minority students from excelling in secondary and higher education. The paper suggests approaches to increasing minority enrollment: agitation among educators and politicians for multicultural education, determination of administrators to become more creative with regard to using majority teachers, and analysis of the effects of desegregation to determine its effect on this crisis. This paper contains 16 references. (DHP)

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ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES TO THE INCREASING OF MINORITY TEACHERS IN THE RURAL SOUTH

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ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES TO THE INCREASING OF MINORITY TEACHERS IN THE RURAL SOUTH

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Undoubtedly, the need for increased numbers of minority teachers has been one of the most focused topics dealt with in recent times. This issue, which is no longer only perennially highlighted, is partially in response to the projected demographic trends regarding racial distribution in the United States of America (more particularly with respect to African-Americans and Hispanics), and the inverse relationship reflected in dwindling numbers of minority teachers. A recent collaborative report by the American Council on Education and Education Commission of the States projects that well over one-third of the national population will be of African-American and/or Hispanic descent while the school population will reflect about forty-two percent of similar ethnicity in the year 2000 (1988). But the plight is not merely an impending one but is really a 'bad situation which is deemed to be getting worse.' C. Whitaker, in a rather provoking article entitled "The Disappearing Black Teacher," paints the picture more accurately:

> Statistics bring this pending crisis into dramatic focus. Presently [African-American] children constitute more than 60 percent of the population of the nation's elementary and secondary public schools, according to a 1987 survey by the National Education Association. Yet, only 6.9 percent of the country's public school teachers are [African-Americans.] The survey also suggested that at the current rate of population growth and minority teacher attrition, [African-Americans] may make up more than 40 percent of the children in the public schools by the year 2000, while constituting less than five percent of the teaching force (1989, p. 24).

This paper addresses three pertinent questions with respect to the declining participation of minorities in the teaching profession. First, there is an exploration of some of the factors that may be responsible for this phenomenon. Secondly, the implications for such a phenomenon are addressed. Thirdly, a modest attempt is made at suggesting some alternative responses to ameliorating the situation.

Viewing the attrition of African-American and other minority teachers from a macro-perspective, one may be persuaded to attribute such attrition to the spill-over effects of national Affirmative Action programs. Undoubtedly, such programs have made possible more occupational opportunities for African-Americans and other minorities in both the private and public sectors. One may conclude that such pipelines allow for a significant draining away of minority teachers from the classroom especially when one finds that the level of satisfaction with the profession does not necessarily influence minority teachers to remain in the profession.

> While teachers' satisfaction with their careers has increased during the last three years, the number of teachers who say that they are likely to leave the profession has not changed (26%).....[However] the largest difference found was between minority and non-minority teachers, with minorities being far more likely to say that they will leave (40%) than non-minorities (25%)....No matter what their level of satisfaction, however, minority teachers are more likely to say that they will leave the profession than non-minority teachers. Even among minorities who are very satisfied, more than one out of five are likely to leave; among those who are dissatisfied almost three out of four say that they are likely to do so (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1989, p. 13).

But the attrition attributed to the new-found opportunities brought about by Affirmative Action programs are but one side of the push-pull equation. The other side of the equation, the push factors,

may be seen in meagre salary scales and undesirable work conditions, the negative images that are cast on the teaching profession, a constant weakening of parental control which causes an inverse relationship in the rate of disciplinary problems, inter alia. While one may argue that similar working conditions exist for both minority and non-minority teachers, research findings indicate that "[minority teachers] tend to work in areas where student problems....are more acute....[and] perhaps for this reason, minority teachers are....less likely to stay in the teaching profession" (ibid, p. 14). To further exacerbate the problem, the question of alienation becomes very real for the minority teacher who finds himself/herself to be the 'lone one on the block' amidst this continuing decrease of minority teachers in the classroom. Henry L. Gates, Jr., a senior Andrew W. Mellon fellow at the National Humanities Center describes this situation rather aptly as he describes a similar plight for African-American college professors:

> Few of us - very few - wish to be the "only [African-American] on the block." And the cultural isolation and estrangement that still prevail on college campuses that have been seen historically as bastions of white middle-class values and norms often prove discomfiting for [African-American] professors (1989, p. A56).

Perhaps the most latent and debilitating factor in the consideration of the continuing decline of minority teachers is the issue of testing and, more particularly, the issue of licensing standards adopted by some states and their impact on minority teacher candidates. G. Pritchy Smith, in an unpublished report felt to be one of the most comprehensive investigations of the subject to date, contends that the effects of testing on prospective minority teacher

candidates is so pervasive and pernicious that "this exclusionary trend is evident regardless of the state and regardless of the type of examination" (1988, p. 16). His conclusions are supported by statistical estimates drawn from 19 states between 1983 and 1988 which attribute the elimination of approximately "37,717 minority candidates and teachers - including 21,515 [African-Americans], 10,142 Hispanics, 1,626 Asians, 716 Native Americans, and 3,718 members of other minorities" (ibid, p. 16), to testing. The disparity between minority and non-minority teacher candidates is even more alarming:

> Typical first-time passing rates on the exams ranged from 15 percent to 50 percent for [African-American] candidates, and from 71 percent to 96 percent for white candidates. The passing rates for other minorities were also significantly lower than for white candidates. They ranged from 39 percent to 65 percent for Hispanics; 37 percent to 77 percent for Asian Americans; and 20 percent to 70 percent for Native Americans (ibid, p. 16).

To be sure, the phenomenon of decreasing minority teachers' presence in the classroom has severe implications for the future of the American society. Peter Loehr, Chairman of the Ohio Minority Recruitment Consortium, in a recently published article on "The 'Urgent Need' for Minority Teachers," pungently highlighted the far-reaching implications of this phenomenon:

> As the proportion of white teachers grows, role modeling that might encourage minority students to pursue careers in education decreases. And as the proportion of minority teachers falls, the perceived importance of academic achievement to minority students also declines.
>
> Positive role modeling and characterization are crucial for ensuring commitment of minority youngsters to schooling. Without sufficient exposure to minority teachers throughout their education, both minority and majority students come to characterize the teaching -

> and the academic enterprise in general - as better suited to whites.
>
> Under these circumstances, urban [and rural] school systems will fail their students - who will drop out in increasing numbers - and their communities at large. And the long-term economic consequences - higher unemployment, welfare, and crime rates, fewer qualified workers - could prove devastating, both for individual states and the nation (1988, p. 32).

Put another way, and even more illuminating of the societal malignancy that is imminent if the phenomenon of decreasing minority teachers is left uncontrolled and unabated, is the position taken by Reginald Wilson, Director of Minority Concerns with the American Council on Education: "If one-third of that work force is undereducated and underemployed, the majority of Americans suffer. It is the crisis of the majority that is the real issue before the American people. Are we capable of saving ourselves, is the real question" (1988, p. 4). The crux of the matter is that too often what is indeed a crisis of majorities is relegated to a crisis of minorities.

The case for increasing minority teachers in the rural South is even more problemmatic. Two recent studies of the rural South indicate that there are some serious structural problems in those communities which inhibit minority students from excelling in large numbers at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. In a paper resulting from one of those studies, "Cultural Constraints to the Integration of Multicultural Education into the Curricula of Small Southern Colleges and Universities," the question of the place of race as a pivotal concept around which the distinctiveness of the rural South is preserved is dealt with at length (Mattai, 1988a). It is argued that the very manner in which race operates in the social structure does not only determine its potency and entrenched position (Phillips, 1928; Thompson, 1975; Anderson, 1984), but that there is an

environment created where seeming concessions are made only as manifestations of conformity to legal sanctions or political pressures extraneous to the community. Research findings of another study, "A Reconsideration of the Effects of Educational Attainment on Occupational Achievement and Income Returns Among African-Americans in the Rural South," contend that there is a sense of geographical immobility among many rural Southern African-Americans which is largely indicative not only of a passivity which minimizes their contribution to the favorable resolution of their socio-economic status, but which also affects their decision to relocate in pursuit of career opportunities (Mattai, 1988b). The positions taken in those studies, viz, the persistence of race as a pivotal concept around which the distinctiveness of the rural South is preserved and the seeming complacency of African-Americans in the rural South with regard to their status in those communities, have serious implications for increasing the number of minority teachers and, more particularly, to do so when the number of African-Americans opting to enroll in college is decreasing.

The task of increasing enrollment of minorities in the teaching profession in the rural South (as elsewhere in the United States of America) should neither be viewed as a short-term proposal nor one that can be accomplished by a piece-meal effort. We would like to suggest four approaches in the efforts to increase the enrollment of minorities in the teaching profession in the rural South. First, there must be an agitation among educators and politicians alike to cause multicultural education to be mandated in the school curricula at all levels. Secondly, there must be a genuine realization by the

persons involved in reversing the trend of the declining presence of minority teachers that this is an "unusual" problem that demands an "unusual" situation. Thirdly, there must be a determination among administrators to become more creative with regard to the utilization of the services of some of the 'majority' teachers. Fourthly, there needs to be a serious analysis made of the effects of desegregation and to see to what extent the desegregation of schools has contributed to the present state-of-affairs.

Undoubtedly, the manner in which the curriculum is contructed largely determines the social relations of a society, particularly those of a society which boasts of being a pluralist one. Brian M. Bullivant sums up rather succintly the way in which curriculum development and implementation operates in the transmission of culture:

> ....Schools and other enculturating agencies employ a curriculum as their main strategy for ordering the selection of knowledge for which they are responsible. Among the many aspects of the curriculum which are considered, that of the selection process itself is crucial. It entails 'knowledge managers' of various kinds coming to value-based decisions about the type of society which the educational system serves. Some of the decisions take account of the empirical realities of the society, others are more ideological. All decisions inevitably involve control over the type of knowledge to be transmitted, to whom, under what conditions, and so on. In short, knowledge managers can control power through the way they make knowledge accessible to children. Those social and ethnic groups whose children are deemed more 'worthy' of receiving more knowledge than other children or of receiving it under more favorable circumstances, will be related to the way knowledge managers interpret the place and status of these groups in their society. In a culturally pluralist society, the way is thus open for knowledge managers to control the life chances of children from 'unworthy' ethnic groups through the education system - a form of ethnic hegemony (1981, p. lx).

It is probable that it is that 'ethnic hegemony' which largely contributes to the decline of minorities in teacher education programs and in academia in general. Robert Rothman cites the suggestion made by the Executive Director for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Gordon Cawelti, that one way in which the reduction of the high dropout rate among minority students may be avoided and thereby ensure a reasonable pool from which to recruit for teacher education progams, inter alia, is through the development and implementation of multicultural curricula that has the net effect of stimulating in minority students a sense of ownership in the schools (1988, p. 1). While this bold move may be interpreted as former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, did when Stanford University replaced its undergraduate course on 'Western Culture' by one on 'Cultures, Ideas, and Values,' i.e., "....as an unfortunate capitulation to a campaign of pressure politics and intimidation," (1988, p. 11), the rationale for the move to mandate multicultural education into the curricula of schools, colleges, and universities, should unequivocally be the same as the faculty senate at Stanford University: "....broadening [students'] understanding of ideas and values drawn from different strands of their own culture, and increas[ing] their understanding of cultural diversity and the process of cultural interaction," (ibid., p. 11).

We do not make a naive presumption in this paper that the mandating of the inclusion of multicultural education into the curricula of schools, colleges, and universities is a panacea for addressing the shortage of minorities in the teaching profession. Rather, it is our convicted position that the inclusion of

multicultural education into the curriculum will cause the evolution of an enlightened atmosphere in which there will be a greater appreciation for diversity. Such an appreciation may significantly minimize, if not eventually obliterate, the alienation of minorities from the mainstream of the society and the perception that education is an 'Anglo thing'.

The second suggestion is that we ought to recognize that the dwindling number of minority teachers is an 'unusual' problem. To be sure, in an effort to correct the imbalances of minority representation in various sectors of the society there have been some concessions made as to how those imbalances may disappear. However, there still seems to be a great reluctance to deal with each situation in its context and to make concessions which initially may be a departure from the norm but with the right kind of treatment may result in an equitable situation. For example, does one really need a baccalaureate degree to teach elementary and junior high students? Or, does one really need a Ph.D. degree to teach at the undergraduate level? There is every reason why a minority student who has displayed a fair degree of competence in any subject area should be employed by a school district to teach in that subject area while still completing his/her baccalaureate degree and certification procedures and encouraged to stay in the teaching profession. The same is true for the person at the college level. Too often, the question of 'diluting standards' and an overconcern with the required credentials become obstacles forcing persons to apply normal conditions to a situation that is by nature 'unusual'. The end result is a vicious circle - there are very few minority students available for recruitment in the

teacher education program because they have not passed the tests and do not have the requisite credentials; they were weeded out very early in the educational system as being unfit academically - a situation resultant largely from the absence of role models and persons who were concerned enough to "believe" in the latent or different learning abilities of those students. There is even more reason to apply the approach we have suggested when we consider that institutions are willing to employ graduate/teaching assistants to teach undergraduate courses and that some college students who have not completed the requirements for the bacculaureate engage in substitute teaching.

Thirdly, there must be a determination among administrators to become more creative with regard to the utilization of the services of some of the more competent minority students in the immediate setting and selected 'majority' teachers. In the absence of adequate numbers of minority candidates who can be recruited into the teaching profession, there is no reason why we might not use minority students as role models in such situations. In both the college/university and non-college/university environment, the active presence of minority students who assist in the pedagogical functions may decrease the alienation among minority students and thereby create an impetus for their continued involvement in academia. <u>In addition, and not as a substitution</u>, we need to engage the efforts of majority teachers who understand and are <u>au fait</u> with the specific needs, concerns, and cultural characteristics of minorities. Institutions need to require that more majority teachers demonstrate a commitment to becoming more <u>au fait</u> with those areas through their genuine involvement in

community activities in the minority community, willingness to develop partnerships with minority groups, etc.

Finally, there needs to be a serious analysis made of the effects of desegregation and ascertain to what extent desegregation of schools has contributed to the present state-of-affairs. Despite the fact that desegregation efforts have spanned almost half of a century, there is still an absence of empirically-based research attempts which have tried to look at the impact it has (had?) for African-Americans. What we do know with a great degree of certainty is that desegregation efforts have literally drained historically/predominantly African-American institutions of their clientele only to have many of the latter become frustrated, stymied, and disenchanted participants in the 'revolving doors' of majority institutions. The following statistical consideration best illustrates the point:

> ....in 1965, only 600,000 [African-Americans] were in college. By 1980, one million were enrolled. Similarly, in 1965, 85 percent of [African-Americans] were in historically [African-American] colleges. By 1980, 80 percent were in predominantly white institutions....
> - Between 1979 and 1986 [African-American] college enrollments declined by 11 percent, Hispanics by 16 percent despite increased high school graduation for both groups.
> - For [African-Americans] the decline is at every level: undergraduate, graduate, and in professional schools. And the number of [African-American] faculty is declining as well (Wilson, 1988, p. 474).

The point of the matter is that many African-Americans were led to believe that "....predominantly white colleges and universities provide African-Americans with a 'better degree' both in terms of content and the possibility for future career and academic advancement" (Mattai and Mattai, 1988, p. 7). This continues to

happen, according to Jacqueline Fleming, even though ".....[African-American] colleges produce greater gains in the cognitive domain....greater social psychological supports,....[and] the academic/intellectual gains....stand in contradistinction to the direction of development in predominantly white schools" (1984, pp. 186-187). Maybe the wrong entity was desegregated - the schools rather than the finances. If what Professor Fleming contends is taken seriously, then the solution to the declining presence of minority teachers may be found in the majority populations and policy makers looking to the predominantly [African-American] institutions but not without much adjustment. Professor Kenneth S. Tollett articulates rather pellucidly, why such institutions may be looked to for a solution:

> ....Because of [African-American colleges] special functions in educating [African-Americans] by providing creditable models of success, psycho-socially congenial settings, special group-oriented transitional educational enclaves, insurances against a generally declining interest in the education of [African-American] and white students, and the discovery, storing, and preservation of the [African-American] cultural heritage, predominantly [African-American] colleges are quintessentially Affirmative Action institutions (1982, p. 4).

The recruitment and retention of minority teachers must be seen as a long-term proposal which may be addressed by a modification of the structural components in the society. Any attempt at a piece-meal treatment or 'fly-by-night' solutions only defer the issue temporarily and is at best a "band-aid" solution that comes back to haunt us.

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